

# DR. KING 'ASSUMES' PHONE IS TAPPED

But Says He Doesn't Know

Why—Embassies Calm

By The Associated Press

WASHINGTON, Dec. 14—The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. says that he and his associates in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference "assumed all along" that their telephone conversations were tapped but they did not know who was doing it or why.

In a telephone interview from Chicago with a reporter in New York, Dr. King commented on an article by James Reston that appeared in The New York Times today. The article had:

"The Government, beginning with the Kennedy Administration is reported to have listened in on the telephone conversations of Martin Luther King, the Negro leader, during the racial disorders, for reasons best known to itself."

A legal telephone tap by Federal agents could be authorized by the Attorney General at the direction of the President, but only in connection with a case involving national security.

In the telephone interview, Dr. King said that "certainly there is nothing in our movement that involves national security, even the allegations that the civil rights movement is infiltrated by Communist."

## Dispute over Bugging

Mr. Reston's article was a commentary on the burgeoning controversy over wiretapping and electronic eavesdropping by the Government.

The controversy has centered on charges by J. Edgar Hoover, the director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, that Senator Robert F. Kennedy of New York, the Attorney General in the Kennedy Administration, took an interest in and authorized the F.B.I. to use electronic devices to "bug" or eavesdrop on suspected criminals.

Mr. Kennedy has denied that he knew anything about F.B.I. activities in this field.

In his article, Mr. Reston asked if tapping Dr. King's phone had been "done for reasons of national security? Who authorized the taps? We do not know."

He also wrote that "the F.B.I. has been bugging the telephones of foreign embassies, not merely to gather military information that could be vital during a major crisis, but to get diplo-

matic information that might be useful in some awkward diplomatic situation."

A spot check of embassies around Washington disclosed that some thought their phones were tapped, others were confident theirs were not, but most periodically checked their buildings for the presence of eavesdropping devices.

## F.B.I. Refuses Comment

A spokesman for the F.B.I. said today that the bureau would make "no comment whatsoever" on the statement that it had listened in on Dr. King's conversations.

At the Justice Department, an officer said, "The Justice Department is making no comment."

Senator Kennedy declined comment, too.

The Justice Department also refused to comment on the bugging of embassies.

In the telephone interview, Dr. King said:

"We've assumed all along that our phones are tapped, but we haven't known whether it's the local government or Federal or what . . . We've had no evidence that it was the F.B.I."

Asked why the Federal Bureau of Investigation might have tapped his phones, on the assumption that it could have, Dr. King said he had "no idea but to keep up with the movement."

After stating that there was "nothing in our movement that involves national security," Dr. King continued:

"They [the F.B.I.] might use this as the reason and justification. But it's so absurd and untrue that it does not justify wiretapping by any Federal agency."

## Bugging Acknowledged

The Justice Department has recently acknowledged that it had placed hidden microphones in the hotel room of Fred R. Black, a Washington public relations man and former business associate of Robert G. Baker, former Secretary to the Senate Democratic Majority.

As a result of this admission, the conviction of Mr. Black on charges of income tax evasion was nullified by the Supreme Court, which ordered a new trial.

During the pre-trial hearings in the prosecution of Mr. Baker for theft, tax evasion and conspiracy, the Justice Department has also conceded that Mr. Baker's constitutional rights were violated when his telephone conversations with Mr. Black, Edward Levinson, a Las Vegas gambling proprietor, and Benjamin Sigelbaum, a Miami businessman, were intercepted.

In admitting the eavesdropping in these nonsecurity cases, the Justice Department implied that the bugging had been ordered by Mr. Hoover without the knowledge or approval of

Mr. Kennedy.

Smarting under this implication, Mr. Hoover said last Saturday, in response to an inquiry from Representative H. R. Gross, Republican of Iowa, that Mr. Kennedy had approved not only all wiretapping in national security cases but also all bugging in all other cases.

Mr. Kennedy immediately replied that "Mr. Hoover has been misinformed."

## Charges Exchanged

Over the next two days, the disputants exchanged charges and denials and released inter-office memoranda to support their positions.

Mr. Kennedy freely acknowledged that he authorized—as he was required to do—all wiretaps in national security cases, but denied he had any knowledge of such electronic surveillance as that in the Black, Sigelbaum and Levinson investigations.

Any confirmation that Dr. King's phone conversations had been intercepted by taps would only exacerbate the controversy between Mr. Hoover and Senator Kennedy but would also have possibly far-reaching political implications.

A number of embassy spokesmen seemed not particularly surprised by the recent report that the F.B.I. had tapped phones of the Dominican Republic's embassy.